THE

Perſecuting, Diſloyal,

AND

Abſurd TENETS

OF

Thoſe who affect to call themſelves

SECEDERS

Laid OPEN and REFUTED;

IN A

LETTER

ADDRESSED TO THE

Proteſtant Diſſenters

Under the paſtoral Inſpection of the MINISTERS of the PRESBYTERY of *ANTRIM.*

By ALEXANDER COLVILL, *M. D.*

BELFAST:
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A LETTER, &c.

Dear BRETHREN,

WHEN our first Reformers discovered the Errors, Superstition, and Idolatry, which by degrees had obtained in the *Romish* Church, and resolved to withdraw from her Communion; it must be acknowledged, to the glory of God and their immortal honour, that, allowing for the circumstances in which they were, a most extraordinary and noble attempt was made to restore the christian Doctrine and Worship to their original purity and simplicity, agreeable to the scripture Rule and the practice of the ages nearest to the Apostles. Many things however prevented their compleating this desirable work. They were but men uninspired; some doctrines had been esteemed too venerable and sacred to bear canvassing; too great a regard was had to the clamours and invidious misrepresentations of their adversarys; and in many reformed nations a mistaken notion prevailed that we ought to continue every part of the *Romish Mass*, not directly forbidden, together with their theatrical Habits, and superstitious Rites and Ceremonies, with a protestation however against the superstitious Conceits of the Church of *Rome*. The pretence for which was, that as men are hardly persuaded to forsake the way of worship to which they have been accustomed, the bulk of the people, who seldom enter deep into subjects of this sort, from the external similitude of

Worſhip and Dreſs, might be the more eaſily prevailed upon to come out from that impure Church and ſeparate themſelves: And when ſome reclaimed againſt this kind of policy, promiſes were made of a farther reformation. This was attempted in ſome good degree in *England* under the minority of *Edward the Sixth*, but his ſudden death, never to be ſufficiently lamented, put an end to all ſuch hopes, and made way for the bloody reign of *Mary*; who, if God had not cut the time ſhort for *the Elects ſake*, hoped to extirpate our holy Religion, by practiſing the moſt barbarous and inhumane cruelties upon our heroic Confeſſors and Martyrs, from whom, under God, a farther reformation was chiefly expected. To her ſucceeded Queen *Elizabeth*, truly glorious for her magnanimity, the political maxims of her government, and her care to encreaſe the riches, extend the trade, and maintain the ſafety of her people. But as ſhe was a Princeſs of great ſtatelineſs, and had a ſtrong paſſion for a pompous worſhip, theatrical and ſhowey habits, and even for ſome opinions and idolatrous practices of the Church of *Rome*; 'tis not to be wondred at that the Reformation, ſo far from being improved in her reign, was never brought up to the perfection it had attained to in the days of her brother *Edward*. In virtue of her title of *ſupreme Governour* of the *Church of England*, with which the *Parliament* had complemeated her Father and his deſcendents, ſhe aſſumed a moſt unbounded power over both Clergy and People; none daring either to preach or exerciſe diſcipline without her ſpecial licence, nor were the people allow'd to believe or practiſe in religion farther than was agreeable to her royal will and pleaſure. Articles of religion were drawn up, and modes of worſhip preſcribed, to which all muſt conform; and learned and ſincere *Proteſtants*, for acting according to

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their conſciences, were not only deprived of their livings, and laid aſide as uſeleſs and broken veſſels, but caſt into loathſome dungeons, and loaded with irons. This was a matter of extreme griet as well to the worthy and learned reformed Biſhops and Clergy in *England*, as to the foreign Proteſtants; as it was a manifeſt invaſion of the kingly authority of *Chriſt*, a trampling upon the Rights of Conſcience, and the putting an effectual bar in the way of farther Reformation and progreſs in chriſtian knowledge. Strange infatuation, that a proteſtant Princeſs ſhould claim an almoſt papal authority over conſcience, that infallibility in the Church ſhould be deny'd, and a certainty in the ſmalleſt matters in or concerning religion ſhould be claimed! To own we may err and yet force our religious opinions and practices, in leſſer and diſputable points, upon worthy men who cannot ſee with our eyes, and that under pains and penalties, not ſuffering our fellow chriſtians to abound in their own judgment, or be fully perſuaded in their own minds what is acceptable or diſpleaſing to God; even tho' the chriſtian rule aſſureth us that *whatever*, of this ſort, *is not of Faith, is Sin*.---- Strange and unaccountable as this muſt ſeem, it is nevertheleſs a juſt account of the ſtate of Religion in this ſo highly celebrated Reign. Pious men were not wanting to themſelves in the moſt prudent and ſtrenuous endeavours for relief, and to obtain a purer Reformation; but her majeſty was deaf to their endeavours and entreaties; they were unwilling to ſeparate from the communion of the Church of *England* whilſt any hopes were left, tho' they frequently aſſembled to worſhip God in private, according to their conſciences, and in that way whereby their edification was beſt promoted. For this they were nick-named *Puritans* by the high prevailing party, yet were they admired and reverenced

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by the people for the virtue and ſanctity of their lives, and their zealous and edifying Diſcourſes.

From theſe Men, in after times and founded on the ſame principles, did *Nonconformiſts* or proteſtant Diſſenters ſpring. In their cauſe the honour of the great God, and of Jeſus Chriſt our Lord and Saviour, and the reaſonable ſervice and religion of men, are bound up and united; over which the wit of men and the policy of Hell could never prevail, were ſuch principles perfectly underſtood and ſteadily and uniformly adhered to. But alas! to their ſhame it muſt be owned, that theſe very Puritans, when, by an aſtoniſhing turn of affairs, they were not only freed from the Church oppreſſions under which they had groaned, but had got a majority of their friends at the Helm, they, far from being ſatisfied with the eccleſiaſtical Benefices or even the eſtabliſhment of their own Diſcipline and Worſhip, would have it preſſed upon the Conſciences, and crammed down the Throats of all the men and women in the nation, under moſt unchriſtian pains and penalties; refuſing a Toleration as well to their brethren of the Church of *England*, then under their feet, as to the *Independants*, *Anabaptiſts*, *Quakers*, and other parties of innocent and harmleſs Chriſtians, who were not only inoffenſive, but alſo loyal and good ſubjects, and uſeful and valuable members of the community.---------What added to this extravagance and antichriſtian tyranny was, that all this was bound upon the conſciences of the people by a *Solemn League* and *Covenant*; framed in *Scotland* and approved by the Aſſembly of Divines then ſitting at *Weſtminſter*, and afterwards by both houſes of *Parliament*, and by them firſt ſworn, who ſoon impoſed it upon the whole nation. It will ſcarcely appear poſſible to ſuch of you as are unacquainted with the hiſtory of theſe times, that a body of venerable

nerable Divines epiſcopally ordained (for beſides the four *Scotch* members there were not above ſeven or eight of another ſtamp) and two houſes of *Parliament*, who pretended to no more at firſt but to reform the Doctrine, Diſcipline, and Worſhip of the Church of *England*, in ſuch points as might ſtand in need of it, ſhould with ſo much precipitation, not only reſolve but ſwear to the total extirpation and abolition of that form of Worſhip and Diſcipline: And yet it is certain that the *Solemn League* and *Covenant* was drawn up and approved of in *Edinburgh* the 17th day of *Auguſt* 1643, and ſworn to by the aſſembly of divines at *Weſtminſter*, and the lower houſe of *Parliament* the 25th of *September* following; ſo that it travailed near four hundred miles, and was approved and ſworn to in leſs than forty days; a great and weighty work for ſo ſhort a time.——There were however preſſing reaſons that drove them thus headlong; the royal Army had been victorious; the Parliament affairs were brought to the loweſt ebb; the aſſiſtance of *Scotland* was thought abſolutely neceſſary, but to be obtained upon no other terms than a near uniformity with them in Doctrine, Diſcipline, and Worſhip. The *Scots* hated Epiſcopacy and the ſervice book, as well from principle, it being contrary to their method of reforming, as alſo from reſentment at the barbarous and inhumanly cruel manner in which they had been impoſed upon them. To the *Engliſh* Biſhops was generally aſcribed the Kings obſtinacy, and all the bloodſhed and confuſion of the nation. And 'tis not unlikely that the Clergy of the puritanical ſtamp wanted to be rid of them, as the chief Lets to a farther Reformation of Religion; If ſome of them alſo did not look up too wiſhfully to their Dignities and Revenues. But be their motives or pretences what they would, their procedure in this matter

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was beyond all controverſy moſt unrighteous and unchriſtian, and a grievous ſnare to the conſciences of Men.

I apprehend that it is a duty incumbent upon me at this time to ſet this matter in the cleareſt light I can, and to make it evident beyond all reaſonable contradiction; in as much as there are ſeveral Itinerant Preachers practicing upon ſuch weak perſons as they can ſeduce, whoſe profeſſed intention is to revive the abſurd notions of an uniformity of Doctrine, Diſcipline, and Worſhip, with the Church of *Scotland* in her covenanting period, and who would perſuade men that the impoſition of the *ſolemn League* and *Covenant* was not only right at that time, but alſo that the deſcendents of ſuch as took it are obliged to the performance of it to this very day. Upon ſuch an occaſion it may well be expected that in a *Presbytery* aſſociated for the defence of the kingly Authority of Jeſus Chriſt, and the liberty wherewith he has made his diſciples free, ſome ſhould be found that could not allow themſelves to be altogether ſilent. Would ſome of my Brethren, who were much better qualified to do it, have complyed with my earneſt entreaties, the intention of this letter would have been more effectually attained; I hope nevertheleſs you will weigh impartially what is ſet forth; And, however the author has been traduced, ſuffer the ſtrength of his arguments to have a due influence upon your minds.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge it with thankfulneſs to God, and, to your honour, that our labours in ſetting theſe momentous points before your minds have neither been unacceptable nor without ſucceſs. You are too well grounded in the principles of Chriſtian Liberty, Moderation, and Charity, to leave me any room to fear that you ſhould be miſled by the ſpecious pretences of ſuch men,

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or to follow after them; who were caſt out by the Church of *Scotland*, and whoſe narrow and uncharitable principles oblige them to ſuſpend and declare each others Churches vacant for every ſmall difference in judgment or practice. Nor am I without hopes that the irregular, uncharitable, and imperious behaviour of theſe men may engage our brethren of the *Synodical Aſſociation* to examine more narrowly and impartialy the claims of Church Power over the conſciences of men; till they acknowledge with us, that the *Bible* is the Chriſtians only rule, the due exerciſe of our reaſon, through the aſſiſtance of the holy Spirit and Grace of God, the only way we can take to come at the meaning of it; that there is no middle between claiming infallibility and the allowing men to make the beſt uſe in their power of their *Bibles* and their Reaſon, and believing whatever, after the moſt impartial examination, appears to be the will of God, and profeſſing and practiſing accordingly; that whoever does ſo, however he may not be either *Calviniſt* or *Lutheran*, nor agree exactly with any particular ſect, yet he is undoubtedly a Chriſtian, does all he can to pleaſe God, and therefore has good grounds to hope that he will be accepted of him; that in many points of opinion the moſt ſincere and learned have not been able to agree, and that this is no leſs true of the Diſcipline and Government of the Church, and Modes of Worſhip; and in conſequence that to decide with miniſterial authority ſuch doubtful and diſputable opinions, modes of Worſhip, and Diſcipline, and make them terms of miniſterial or Chriſtian communion, is a contradiction to our character as Chriſtians, Proteſtants, and proteſtant Diſſenters; injurious to the alone Lord of conſcience, and deſtructive of chriſtian Peace and Charity.

The *ſolemn League* and *Covenant* was not only very faulty, in preſſing the *Scots* Diſcipline and modes of Worſhip upon thoſe whoſe conſciences were not convinced that it was appointed by the head of the Church, and who rather approved of Independency or a limited moderate Epiſcopacy; but alſo in that it was inforced by grievous pains and penalties. The refuſers to ſwear it were not only rendered incapable of being teachers in the leading and publicly authorized religion, but alſo were precluded from a capacity of ſhareing in the poſts of honour or profit, which the government have to beſtow on loyal and good Subjects; a chance to ſhare in which, whilſt they continued ſuch, was their birthright; and, as if all this had been a ſmall injury, their goods were confiſcated, their effects ſeized, and their bodies impriſoned; and they were declared to be enemies to religion and the ſtate. From this juſt account we may ſee, and conſequently cannot but deteſt and ſtand upon our guard againſt the ſpirit of our preſent *Covenanters*. And though they conceal the cloven foot as much as may be from the ignorant, and explain in the ſofteſt manner poſſible the *extirpation* of Popery, Prelacy, Hereſy, Sciſm, and whatever is contrary to ſound doctrine, yet wiſe men can eaſily ſee through thoſe thin diſguiſes. The ſenſe of any law is undoubtedly to be taken from the frame of it. Let us then judge what the framers of the Covenant intended by the word *Extirpate* from their practice. They meant to repreſent all ſuch as could not find the divine right of their Presbytery, to be enemies to religion and the ſtate, to forfeit their right to the privileges of ſubjects, to loſe their goods, eſtate and liberty, and having robbed them of whatever was dear to them in this world, they deprived them of the means of Gods grace and eternal Happineſs, by refuſing them a liberty

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to worſhip God according to their conſciences, in however private or inoffenſive manner this ſhould be performed. To uſe the Common Prayer, even in a private family, was by an ordinance of Parliament, of their procuring, ſufficient to ſubject a perſon for the firſt offence to a Fine of five pounds, for the ſecond to a Fine of ten pounds, and for a third offence to impriſonment; nor would they permit the king himſelf to uſe that form of Worſhip even in his own Chapel; ſuch was the ſenſe then put upon *Extirpating* Prelacy and Sciſm, and ſuch the ſpirit of the Covenanters.

I would farther obſerve, that a ſincere and ſtrict Covenanter cannot be a good Subject to King *George*, in regard that by his coronation oath he is bound to ſupport and maintain the Churches of *England* and *Ireland* as by law eſtabliſhed, which they ſwear to extirpate. The *Seceders*, as they affect to call themſelves, (tho' it is well known that the beginners of that ſect did not ſeparate from, but were caſt out of the Church of *Scotland*) confeſs that the taking the oaths of *Alegiance* and *Abjuration* is a national ſin, and lament it that ſome of them for a time were left (I ſuppoſe they mean of God) to do it. 'Tis true they diſown diſloyalty; yet it cannot be denyed that one party of them publickly declare their ſuſpicions of their Brethrens having lately embraced ſome *Antigovernment Principles*; however both parties pretend that by ſwearing the Covenant they give a ſufficient ſecurity for their loyalty; and yet if this matter is throughly examined nothing like it will appear. The words they refer to in the Covenant are theſe, "We ſhall---endeavour to preſerve and defend the "Kings majeſtys perſon and authority, in the de- "fence of the true religion and liberties of the "kingdom"; that is in plain terms, while the King ſhall defend the doctrine, diſcipline and worſhip of

the *Kirk of Scotland* we will defend him, and no longer. And that no one may ſuggeſt that I have put an ill natured gloſs upon theſe words in the Covenant, I would have it obſerved, that when King *Charles* the firſt put himſelf into the protection of the Scotch army, and went with them from *Newwark* to *Newcaſtle*, he apply'd by his friends both to the Kirk and Parliament to receive him, but without effect; for the Aſſembly emitted a ſolemn warning to all eſtates and degrees of perſons throughout the land, dated *December* 17th, 1646, giving reaſons againſt complying with his deſire, in which are theſe words " So long as his majeſty does not ap- " prove with his heart, and ſeal with his hand, the " League and Covenant, we cannot but apprehend " that according to his former principles he will walk " contrary to it, and ſtudy to draw us into the " violation of it------Nor do we ſee how *it is con- " ſiſtent with our Covenant* and Treaties" (*viz.* to receive his Majeſty into *Scotland*) " but on the con- " trary it would involve us in the guilt of perjury, " and expoſe us to the hazards of a bloody war. " We are bound by our Covenant to defend the " King's perſon and authority, in defence and pre- " ſervation of the true Religion and the Liberties " of the kingdom, and ſo far as his Majeſty is for " theſe, we will be for him. But if his Majeſty will " not ſatisfy the juſt deſires of his people, both " *Nations are engaged to purſue* the ends thereof " againſt all Letts and impediments. We therefore " deſire that thoſe who are intruſted with the pub- " lic affairs of this Kingdom would ſtill inſiſt upon " his ſettling Religion according to the Covenant, " as the only means of preſerving himſelf, his " crown and poſterity." And upon reading this admonition of the Kirk, the Scots Parliament reſolved, " That his Majeſty be deſired to grant the " whole Propoſitions, that in caſe of refuſal the

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" Kingdom ſhould be ſecured without him"; they declared farther, " That the Kingdom of *Scotland* " could not lawfully engage for the King, ſo long " as he refuſed to take the Covenant." This is ſo ſtrong and plain an account of the Loyalty intended by the Covenanters by ſwearing the ſolemn League, that I apprehend it can ſtand in need of no farther illuſtration. But if it ſhould be reply'd to this, that the Seceders are ſo far from being rebels that many of them carried arms for the King againſt the Son of the Pretender to his crown, during the time of the late Rebellion; the fallacy of this pretence is obvious. For however by their Covenant the Seceders ſwear to extirpate Prelacy as well as Popery, no doubt they abhor the latter more than the former, and would rather we had a King of the one religion than of the other; and had they no other liking to the eſtabliſhed religion in *England* and *Ireland* upon other accounts, yet a regard to themſelves would caſt the ballance; they experience the mildneſs of a proteſtant government; they know, did Popery prevail, they would then be heretics and ſciſmatics in the eye of the law, and durſt not go about raiſing contributions, and treating all who differ from them with ſcurility and and ſlander; it would not be prudent for a ſmall deſpiſed handful of men to ſpeak too plain upon theſe points; they cannot by any oath be obliged to undertake impoſſibilities. But ſtill, conſidering the ſenſe their forefathers put upon the Covenant, and the natural import of the words, and their zeal in preſſing people to renew it; before we can form an argument in favour of their loyalty from their Practice, we muſt ſee a Pretender to the throne who would ſwear their Covenant, and undertake to uſe all his power to bring the three Nations to an uniformity of Doctrine, Diſcipline, and Worſhip, with the Scots in their covenanting

nanting period. If ſuch a caſe ſhould happen, can any man in his ſenſes think that they would heſitate what party to chuſe? Muſt they not be for *King George* ſo long as he was for them? and have they not ſworn to promote the ends of the Covenant againſt all Lets and impediments whatſoever? would not their language then be that he muſt himſelf take the Covenant as the only means of preſerving himſelf, his crown, and poſterity?

I would farther obſerve that if Proteſtant Diſſenters ſhould be prevailed upon by Seceders to accede to them, and ſwear to their Solemn League, they would make a moſt ungrateful return to our Governors, and be altogether unworthy of that liberty and toleration which they have granted us. It is a fact too notorious to be denyed that moſt Proteſtants when they left Popery did not caſt off their perſecuting ſpirit; they compiled articles and confeſſions, and framed acts of uniformity for worſhip, very grievous to ſerious Chriſtians, inforced by many unhallowed penalties; inſomuch that great numbers, after ſuffering the greateſt hardſhips at home, were obliged to tranſport themſelves to the Plantations abroad, as a place of refuge, and that they might obtain liberty of conſcience. If the Puritans and Scots Presbyterians ſhewed a perſecuting ſpirit when they were the eſtabliſhed religion and in power; tho' nothing can juſtify their conduct, yet they have this excuſe, that oppreſſion often times makes wiſe men mad. They had juſt eſcaped out of the fiery furnace of perſecution, uniformity to the Engliſh ſervice and government had been preſt under the ſevereſt penalties and by the moſt unchriſtian methods. Indeed civil and religious liberty, the juſt prerogatives of the crown and the rights of the people, were never ſo generally well underſtood nor ſo ingeniouſly defended as ſince the

times

times of the late glorious Revolution. Since that happy period many of the Prelates themſelves have been the moſt ſtrenuous defenders of the rights of their fellow ſubjects and fellow Proteſtants; they have not only loudly diſclaimed againſt all human laws binding conſciences in matters purely religious, all eſtabliſhments which exclude a toleration of ſcrupulous and tender conſciences; but they have gone farther, and condemned even negative diſcouragements, and the diſqualifying a large body of Proteſtants, who are good and loyal ſubjects, from a capacity of enjoying the poſts, truſts, and emoluments, which the government have to beſtow upon capable and deſerving men. The Proteſtant Diſſenters, on the other hand, are ever ready to avow their utter abhorrence of the perſecuting ſpirit of the Covenanters and Puritans at and immediately after the time of the civil war. They are deeply concerned that perſons of ſuch diſtinguiſhed learning and abilities, and zeal for the reformation of religion, and the civil rights of their fellow ſubjects, ſhould have run into ſuch ſhameful and fatal miſtakes with reſpect to the kingly authority of Chriſt, and the liberty wherewith he has made his diſciples free. As this is undoubtedly the ſenſe of the moderate and learned, both among the Conformiſts and Non-conformiſts; it would be very hard to impute the errors of our forefathers to the preſent age. And were it not for the attempts of ſome weak, and uncharitable, and furious ſpirits, who being full of the *old leaven*, would *compaſs ſea and land* to revive the old narrow and uncharitable diſpoſition, I could wiſh, if it were poſſible, that the ſtory of the perſecutions of Proteſtants one of another for conſcience ſake, were blotted out of the Britiſh Annals, never more to be remembred. But as the ſad ſtorys of theſe times can never be forgotten, they ought to be ſet up as beacons to prevent

vent our ſplitting upon the like rocks and quick-ſands with our forefathers, and we ought to look upon theſe men and their principles as moſt to be deteſted, and as the greateſt enemies to our peace, to genuine Chriſtianity, and the Proteſtant Religion, who inſtead of diſpoſing us to bear with and love each other (notwithſtanding our different opinions and practices in leſſer and diſputable matters) would perſuade us to hate and worry one another.

I would farther obſerve that the perſuading the common people to ſwear the *ſolemn League* and *Covenant* evidently leads them into perjury, or at the leaſt into very raſh ſwearing. We are commanded *to ſwear unto God not only in truth, but in righteouſneſs and in judgment. And a good man feareth an oath.* But who among the common people can with judgment ſwear that he will mantain the Doctrine and Diſcipline of the Church of *Scotland*? Is he or can he be a competent judge of many controverted points of Divinity contained in their Confeſſion of Faith and Catechiſms? Or if ſuch a a perſon thinks at preſent that they are right in every point; is he ſure he ſhall never ſee reaſon to change his mind in the ſmalleſt or moſt diſputable matter? Has he examined the Scriptures with ſufficient care to be able to determine whether Jeſus Chriſt has fixed any one form of Church government, excluſive of all others; or whether he has left this to be ſettled by Chriſtian ſocieties, ſo as may beſt promote the ends of edification, and ſuit the genius and circumſtances of the people? If he thinks the firſt of theſe to be the caſe, whether is primitive moderate Epiſcopacy, according to the model of the moſt reverend and learned archbiſhop *Uſher*, Independency, dioceſan Epiſcopacy, or Presbytery, the government of the Church ſettled by Chriſt and his

his Apoſtles? can any man of common ingenuity or modeſty pretend to ſhow that the whole hierarchy of Archbiſhops, Biſhops, Deans and Chapters, Diocesan courts, managed by lay Chancellours or Surrogates, is clearly appointed in the New Teſtament? Or will they pretend on the other hand that Kirk Seſſions, Presbyterys, provincial and national Synods, as now conſtituted, armed with a coercive power, and independent upon the ſtate, is of Divine appointment? Have all the elders of a Kirk Seſſion a right to vote, where there is but one miniſter who moderates, and has no vote unleſs the elders be equally divided in their opinions? And in a Presbytery muſt there be one Elder only to each miniſter, and in a national aſſembly in *Scotland* three miniſters to one Elder; but in *Ireland* one Elder to each miniſter? Is the whole of this of Divine right, however inconſiſtent and contradictory; or rather is it not evident to the loweſt underſtanding that a great meaſure of human policy has mixt it ſelf with every ſcheme or conſtitution of church government? But be this matter ſettled as it may, 'tis plain the moſt pious and learned, after all their reading and pains to come at the truth, have entertained very different ſentiments about theſe points; and therefore it muſt be a high preſumption in the vulgar and unlearned to pretend to ſuch certainty as that they will ſwear never to be of another mind. Is it not enough that they ſhow their preſent opinion by their practice, be always open to conviction, and willing to be better informed if in any thing they ſhould happen to be miſtaken, and in the mean time to entertain an humble opinion of their own attainments, and to cheriſh charity and forbearance to ſuch as differ from them?

THERE are many other great and juſt exceptions that readily offer themſelves to every impartial and

conſidering mind againſt the ſwearing, and eſpecially the impoſing, the *ſolemn League*, beſides theſe I have mentioned, which for brevity I chuſe to omit; but from what has been ſaid I truſt it does abundantly appear how big with miſchief and cruelty the attempts of the preſent Seceders muſt appear to every impartial enquirer. I am well ſatisfy'd their attempts to impoſe upon you muſt be vain and without ſucceſs, upon whom the duties of chriſtian charity, forbearance and loyalty have been ſo frequently and ſtrongly inculcated; and they are ſo ſenſible of this that their hopes ſeem to be from another quarter. In this I doubt not but they will alſo meet with diſappointment; for however in ſo great a number, as the proteſtant Diſſenters in the North of *Ireland* are, 'tis natural to think there muſt be many weak men capable of being practiſed upon, yet I can never believe that a body of men ſo famous for their loyalty and attachment to revolution Principles, and the proteſtant ſucceſſion to the crown in the auguſt and illuſtrious houſe of *Hanover*, will ever be perſuaded that it is a ſin to take the oaths of Allegiance and Abjuration, and that all their Paſtors living, or dead for many years paſt, have been ſinners on that account; or that we ſhould hope for a liberty to worſhip God according to our conſciences from our governours, though they think us miſtaken, and at the ſame time ſwear to *extirpate* their forms of diſcipline and worſhip. I am perſuaded the body of proteſtant Diſſenters are thankful for the favour and protection of the government which they enjoy, and would be far from deſiring, much leſs endeavouring, to pull up foundations and turn all things into blood and confuſion, for the ſake of an uniformity of *Scots* diſcipline and worſhip. Their own Paſtors will no doubt caution them in ſuch a way as may ſeem proper

to

to them, againſt all the efforts of theſe ſtrangers to engage them in diſloyal or ſuſpicious meaſures: For my own part, I take this opportunity of declaring to the world my utter abhorrence of ſuch principles and practices; and to free my ſelf from any ſhare of that reproach to which the body of proteſtant Diſſenters may be juſtly expoſed, if they did not in the moſt public manner bear their teſtimony againſt all ſuch diſloyal or ſuſpicious notions. And in this I have the hearty concurrence of all my brethren of the presbytery of *Antrim*. And as the proteſtant Diſſenters in the North of *Ireland* have maintained their loyalty in all changes and turns of government, ſuffering very grievous things, for conſcience towards God, with the greateſt patience under tyranical and perſecuting Princes, ſurely the moſt generous indignation cannot fail to riſe up in your breaſts, againſt any meaſures that ſeem inconſiſtent with the duty and allegiance which you owe to his ſacred majeſty our rightful ſovereign *King George*; the moſt unſhaken and undiſguiſed loyalty we all certainly owe him, who is not ſo much the King as the Father of his people, and whoever does not ſo think and behave is guilty of the blackeſt treaſon, and moſt horrid ingratitude.

HAVING, as I think, made it abundantly evident that the *Seceders* hold principles deſtructive of chriſtian peace and charity, and tending to ſedition in the ſtate, whenever they may meet with a favourable opportunity of putting them in practice; I ſhall, in the laſt place, lay down a ſhort and impartial ſcheme of the doctrine which they hold in religion; which appear to me utterly inconſiſtent with the moral perfections of God, and the general ſtrain of the invitations, precepts, promiſes, and threatnings of His holy word; weaken the obligations to piety and virtue, and diſcourage all

laudable attempts for acquiring a Godlike temper, without which we cannot become the objects of the favour and approbation of the Deity.

They teach that God from all eternity predeſtinated every particular man or woman, that has been or ſhall be in the world, either to ſalvation or damnation, and that unconditionally, without having any reſpect to what they ſhould be or do in time; that this and all his other decrees have no foundation in any divine perfection, but ſovereignty and mere will and pleaſure; that in order to make this purpoſe effectual, which being laſt in the execution was firſt in his intention, he decreed to make our firſt parent our fœderal head and repreſentative, to put all our intereſts into his hands, and that we ſhould be eternally happy or miſerable, according as he ſhould obey or tranſgreſs; that he predeſtinated *Adam* to eat the forbidden fruit, that all his poſterity might be chargeable with his ſin, and liable to damnation; that God however elected a ſmall number of men in Chriſt to ſalvation, who for this purpoſe offered himſelf to ſtand in their ſtead, and to ſuffer all that the vindictive juſtice of God could have inflicted on them, and perform all that his holineſs required of them, for their eſcaping eternal wrath, and their being entitled to, and poſſeſſed of eternal life; that all mankind by the fall when they come into this world are under the wrath and curſe of God, the elect as well as the reprobate, and the Devil gets the firſt hold of them, but that the elect are called effectually in time, by the irreſiſtible operation of the ſpirit of God, to believe in Chriſt that he died for them, that then God juſtifies them freely from the puniſhment of all their ſins, paſt, preſent and to come, and will ſanctify them by his ſpirit in time and in-

infallibly bring them to glory. That as for theſe whom God has reprobated or paſſed by, they are dead in ſins and heirs of wrath, can do nothing pleaſing to God, he has reſolved to withhold grace from them, and make them eternally miſerable; that nevertheleſs it is the duty of every one that hears the goſpel to come to Chriſt and believe he died for them, and the duty of miniſters to tell them ſo though they know that of the *many* who *are called but* very *few are choſen*; that ſaving faith is not attained in the uſe of means, nor will grace and the favour of God follow our moſt ſincere and earneſt endeavours; when the ſpirit pleaſes to call us effectually he will do it, till which time all our endeavours are to no purpoſe; that as God has elected us in Chriſt unconditionally, and the Son of God has paid our debt of ſuffering and obedience, nothing is or can be required of us, for juſtification and ſalvation, but to believe that Chriſt died for us; that the goſpel is a bundle of promiſes not requiring ſincere obedience as a condition of happineſs and the favour of God, and that a believer ought to perform no duty in hope of reward, nor abſtain from any crime for fear of puniſhment; that the law of the ten commandments is not now a law binding believers to obedience, but only a rule of duty in the hand of a mediator; that a breach of any law of eternal righteouſneſs is not ſin in them, for which God can puniſh or even chaſten them; nor ought they to repent of or ask pardon for ſuch offences as a tranſgreſſion of that law, and that to do ſo is a mark of a legal ſpirit; and that the contrary opinions to theſe tend to diſparage the free grace of God, and the merits of Jeſus Chriſt our only Lord and Saviour, and make us in ſome ſort our

own

own Saviours; that believers are not under this law to God, and where there is no law there can be no tranſgreſſion, and therefore God can ſee no iniquity in *Jacob*, nor can he that is born of God commit ſin.

I thought it fit to give a repreſentation of their opinions in one view, as the beſt method I could take to prevent all ſuch into whoſe hands this letter may fall, from being impoſed upon by any artful defences of ſome of the doctrines I have mentioned, either by metaphyſical reaſoning or playing with the ſound of ſome texts, *hard to be underſtood, which the unſtable and unlearned wreſt*, as the Apoſtle *Peter* ſpeaks. I know very well many grave and learned men have defended ſeveral of theſe points maintained by the *Seceders*, becauſe they did not ſee the conſequences that naturally flow from them; but if the *Seceders* and other *Antinomians* have drawn theſe conſequences juſtly, as I own freely I think they have, it may be hoped that ſuch as have formerly held the opinions from which ſuch concluſions neceſſarily flow, will review them ſeriouſly and impartially, and diſcard and give them up; it being a moſt certain and undoubted truth, that nothing can be revealed by God which in its juſt conſequences overthrows the moral perfections of the Deity, contradicts the cleareſt principles of reaſon, and renders the plaineſt and largeſt part of revelation unintelligible, and wholly inſignificant to the purity, holineſs, and happineſs of mankind.

No one who knows how many volumes have been wrote for and againſt many ſingle articles of the Seceders ſcheme, will expect that I ſhould enter into a minute diſcuſſion and elaborate refutation of them. Nor do I apprehend, if this could be done in a moderate compaſs, it would be of great advantage

vantage to unlearned readers. My intention will be ſufficiently anſwered if I ſhew that their ſcheme is inconſiſtent with the divine perfections, the laws, invitations, promiſes, and threatnings of the goſpel, and the doctrine of rewards and puniſhments in another life. 12

The benevolence, truth, and rectitude of the Divine Being are the perfections which we call Moral, which render Him the object of our love, truſt, ſubmiſſion, imitation, and obedience. And if we ſeparate theſe perfections in our minds from the ideas of infinite wiſdom, ſupported by boundleſs power, and repreſent Him to our ſelves as acting by mere will and ſovereignty; the Governour of the univerſe would appear of all others the moſt to be dreaded and deteſted. His wiſdom in ſuch a caſe would degenerate into craft, and his power into tyranny; inſtead of worſhiping Him *with Reverence and godly Fear*, or drawing near to Him as *Children to the Father* of their Spirits, mankind would be tempted to wiſh that there were no ſuch Being in the univerſe; ſeeing upon this ſuppoſition they could neither love, imitate, nor truſt in Him, nor yet know what temper or behaviour would intitle them to hope for His favourable acceptance, nor what would certainly render them the objects of His diſpleaſure. Not to mention that ſuch ſentiments of the Governour of the univerſe would make a cordial ſubmiſſion to the diſpenſations of His providence an impracticable, nay an impoſſible thing.

Agreeably to theſe juſt ſentiments, the Scriptures always repreſent God *as good to all, and His tender Mercies over all His works.*--------*kind to the evil and unthankful*, and ſurely much more ſo to ſuch as endeavour to know, imitate, and obey Him; that *He hath no pleaſure in the death of the unrighteous* nor in the blood of them that periſh--------that chaſtiſing his ſervants is a *ſtrange work to Him*----and that when

He

He doth correct them it is *for their good, and that they may become partakers of His holineſs.* In ſhort, the Apoſtle *John* ſpeaks of Him not only as a Being of the moſt exalted goodneſs and benevolence, but as being *Love* in the abſtract ------*he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, for God is love.*

FARTHER, the ſacred writers conſtantly aſſert that the Governour of the world is a Being of the moſt unfeigned ſincerity and truth, upon whoſe declarations and promiſes we may rely with the fulleſt confidence; *He is a God who cannot Lye*; and therefore to truſt in Him, even when outward appearances are againſt us, is the higheſt wiſdom and virtue------Abraham *believed in God and it was imputed to him for Righteouſneſs*; He will admit none to worſhip Him in His Church but ſuch as *ſpeak the Truth in their Hearts*, nor ſhall any gain admiſſion into the new *Jeruſalem* that *love or make a Lye.*

WE are farther taught that we ought to be in *ſubjection to the Father of our Spirits*, who means our reformation and happineſs by the ſevereſt of His corrections, and that on this account whether He give or take any comfort away from us we ſhould *Bleſs the Name of the Lord.*

AGAIN the Scriptures not only aſſure us that the Deity is poſſeſſed of righteouſneſs, goodneſs and truth, and acts invariably in a conformity to them; but that mankind may have a ſufficient and diſtinct knowledge of theſe perfections as they are in God, from the conſideration of His works of creation and providence, and of His word. Goodneſs, righteouſneſs, and mercy in the Deity are not what ſome ſeem to fancy, ſomething we know not what. If this were the caſe it would be abſurd to appeal to men as to the righteouſneſs and kindneſs of His treatment of them, nor could he ever be the object of our imitation; whereas to be *followers of God as dear Children*-----*merciful and perfect as our Father*

Father in Heaven, is the higheſt excellence, happineſs, and duty of Chriſtians.

FARTHER, the Scriptures every where teach us that the keeping the commandments of God, from a reverend regard of Him, is the whole of Man, his duty and happineſs; that His *Commandments are ſpiritual, holy, juſt and good*; but unleſs we admit, antecedently to all Revelation, that the Deity is neceſſarily good, righteous and true, it would be impoſſible to prove that the old and new Teſtament was from God; or, if it were acknowledged to be a Divine Revelation, that happineſs or miſery ſhould in the end be meaſured out to us according to the declarations, promiſes, and threatnings contained in the ſacred Oracles.

SINCE then Reaſon and Scripture moſt uniformly aſſert the benevolence, righteouſneſs and ſincerity of the Deity; and that theſe His perfections, and the belief of them, are the foundation of all piety and virtue, of all natural and revealed religion; whatever doctrine is inconſiſtent with or contradictory to them cannot be of God. I would beſeech you to try the ſcheme of Seceders at this touchſtone. It would be tedious to ſpeak to every point; I ſhall only mention ſome of them. Is it conſiſtent with the juſtice and goodneſs of God to decree any mans damnation from eternity unconditionally, ſo as let a man do ever ſo much to obtain His favour, even all that he can, he could have no hopes? Can he be a good Being who in his determinations and actings has no regard to right or wrong, does not treat his creatures upon the foot of righteouſneſs and benevolence, but acts from ſovereignty to ſhew the glory of his power in rendering poor worms miſerable; and will do ſuch things for no other reaſon but becauſe he will? Is it juſt to put my ſalvation in the truſt and management of *Adam*, as my fœderal head and

repreſentative, and at the ſame time decree that he ſhould fall, to my everlaſting undoing? Might not God be as well ſuppoſed to have made us ſinners at firſt, as have made us deſcend from a perſon that he had decreed ſhould fall? What now becomes of *Adams* boaſted image of God, and his power of ſtanding? Could he ſtand when God decreed he ſhould fall? What ſtrange inconſiſtencies do ſome Men believe? God choſe the moſt proper perſon to be the fœderal head and repreſentative of his poſterity, one to whom they could have no reaſonable objection againſt truſting their everlaſting concerns in his hands; and yet God decrees he ſhall fall, and by his means his poſterity ſhall all loſe communion with God, are under his wrath and curſe, are made liable to all miſeries in this life, the wrath of God and the pains of hell for ever. O righteous and good Maker and Ruler of the Univerſe! pardon thoſe who have vented and propagated ſuch hard ſpeeches againſt thee.

As theſe and ſuch like doctrines of *Seceders* are a contradiction to reaſon and the moral perfections of the Deity; ſo by their other tenets they render the laws, invitations, promiſes, and threatnings of the Goſpel utterly trifling and of no value.

Where is the wiſdom of giving laws to and requiring obedience from the deſcendents of *Adam*, upon ſuppoſition that they are incapable of doing any thing pleaſing to Him? Or the goodneſs, not to ſay juſtice, of puniſhing them for any duty neglected, or ill performed, or any tranſgreſſion of Gods holy law? They come into the world inclined to all evil, diſinclined to all good, dead in treſpaſſes and ſins to all moral purpoſes, and are by nature children of wrath. I know it is reply'd to this, that we loſt our power of obeying in *Adam*, but that this doth not make void his right to our obe-

obedience. Suppoſing for once this were the caſe, could we be guilty of any ſin but that of *Adam*? What we do naturally we do neceſſarily, and what by nature we are neceſſitated to do, can never be ſin. Suppoſing a man were born blind in conſequence of *Adam*'s fall, this would be his misfortune but not his ſin. Put the caſe that a man was born an idiot; would it be conſiſtent with the wiſdom, ſincerity, and juſtice of the Deity to command him to perform the duties of faith, piety, righteouſneſs, charity and ſobriety; to promiſe him great rewards upon his obedience, and denounce grievous threatnings, and inflict everlaſting and extreme miſery upon him in caſe of non-obedience? And yet it is moſt certain that the poor idiot had as much power of obedience in *Adam*, was as properly repreſented by him, and ſinned in him, as any other man in the world. Surely it muſt be owing to the prejudice of education, or a fondneſs for a darling hypotheſis, that we ſhould not at firſt ſight ſhudder at the thoughts of the Deity's puniſhing an idiot through eternity, for ignorance, unbelief, or diſobedience, ſeeing it was impoſſible for him to be any thing but what he is; and yet ſuppoſe all mankind born under the ſtrongeſt moral incapacities to faith and holineſs, and that notwithſtanding they may be treated as moral and accountable creatures, merely becauſe *Adam* is ſuppoſed to have been created with moral powers which they have forfeited in their repreſentative.

And as any kind of puniſhment inflicted upon perſons who want the moral powers, without which they are incapable to obey, ſeems very abſurd, it is ſtill more ſo to puniſh one of the deſcendents of *Adam* more than another on account of the common grace of God which they have been favoured with, or the ſpecial providences he has exerciſed concerning them, whether it be revealing

to them their duty clearly, or viſiting them with chaſtiſments, or making goodneſs and mercy follow them. The unhappy reprobate might in this caſe plead; "True, Lord, thou madeſt thy will known to me but not ſavingly; I was bray'd in the mortar of affliction, but it was impoſſible that by this I ſhould come out more wiſe; I have ſhared largely of thy goodneſs but thou knoweſt it was impoſſible that I ſhould by this be led to repentance; nothing but ſovereign and irreſiſtible grace could have reſcued me out of that helpleſs and rueful ſtate into which *Adam* has plunged me; the irrevocable decree like the flaming ſword ſtopt my entrance into Paradiſe; if I muſt be miſerable for the ſin of my firſt Parent I would plead not to ſuffer more ſeverely for not being reformed by means which never were intended, or never were capable of attaining that end." Let us ask our ſelves ſeriouſly, are ſuch repreſentations of a juſt and holy God an honouring of him, or rather do they not blaſpheme Him? and whatever ſupport they may receive from the ſound of ſome difficult texts of Scripture, ſurely they are inconſiſtent with the laws, promiſes, and threatnings of the goſpel. The ſovereignty of God is treated with as little decency by thoſe who aſſert that He has a ſecret and revealed will, wholly different the one from the other; by the firſt he means the holineſs and happineſs of a ſmall ſelect number; by the latter he would ſeem to mean the happineſs of all, they only excepted who refuſe complying with the conditions of the chriſtian Covenant. And this refuſal is not in Scripture imputed to any irreverſible decree of God, or utter incapacity in men; not to Gods unwillingneſs to hear aſſiſt and accept of them, but to their unwillingneſs to be reconciled to Him, to *ask his holy Spirit, and to work*

work out their own ſalvation with fear and trembling. How effectually doth he beſeech his people, *Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die, O houſe of Iſrael? As I live ſaith the Lord I have no pleaſure in the death of the unrighteous*, nor in the blood of them that periſh; but *had rather they ſhould turn to me and live.*------*Whoever will let him take of the water of life freely.*------*Of all that come to the father by Me He will in no wiſe caſt out any.*-----*Whoſoever ſeeketh findeth, he that asketh receiveth, and to him that knocketh it ſhall be opened.*------*If any man lack wiſdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.* From all which it ſeems evident that in the due uſe of our moral powers, the improvement of our talents, and the common grace of God, we have reaſon from the goſpel to hope for what ſpecial grace we ſtand in need of to make us *Stand compleat in all the will of Chriſt*--------*To work in us to will and do what is well pleaſing in the ſight of God.*------*And to attain to the end of our faith, the ſalvation of our* precious *ſouls.*

The laſt thing I ſhall animadvert upon in the Seceders ſcheme, which I look upon as the moſt dangerous to the ſouls of men of all others, is their teaching that the goſpel is a bundle of promiſes, that the chriſtian is without law to God; that there are no conditions either of juſtification or ſalvation, but only to believe that Chriſt died for us; that the believer cannot ſin, and therefore cannot be puniſhed, nor even chaſtened, on account of any offence againſt the moral law, and conſequently need not repent or ask God pardon on this account; that our perſonal holineſs has no influence more or leſs upon our happineſs; and that ſincere obedience to the moral law is not ſo much as a qualification for Heaven. It is true the far greater and more learned *Calviniſts* deny

deny theſe conſequences, and I apprehend would give up the principles from whence they are drawn, did they ſee that they certainly and neceſſarily flowed from them. And from ſuch coarſe expreſſions, and ſhocking tenets, the moſt ancient of the preſent Seceders, who recommended the *marrow of modern Divinity*, were cenſured by the *venerable aſſembly of the Church of Scotland*, and were enjoined to make uſe of no ſuch expreſſions in time coming. If any man will attempt to rid the marches between high *Calviniſm* and a moderate and ſober *Antinomian* he will, in my apprehenſion, find it not a very eaſy task. But let this matter be ſettled as it may, I think it moſt evident that what the Seceders teach concerning the free grace of God, and the merits of Jeſus Chriſt, though I hope they do not intend it, greatly takes off from the obligations to holineſs, and weakens the arguments which the wiſdom of God has ſeen proper to make uſe of to prevail with us to forſake ſin, repell temptation, mortify our evil affections, cheriſh good diſpoſitions, and *perfect holineſs in the fear of God.*

For inſtance, if men are unconditionally choſen or reprobated from eternity, the virtues of one or the vices of another can make no alteration in their everlaſting ſtate, and it ſeems moſt abſurd upon this ſuppoſition to warn, reprove, or exhort; if our ſovereign, as our ſurety, ſuffered all that for our ſins which juſtice can inflict, and performed all that righteouſneſs which the holineſs of God can poſſibly exact, if all this becomes ours when we believe that Chriſt died for us, it ſeems juſt to ſay that a believer is under no law, not even the moral law, to God; and therefore that he cannot ſin; as on the other hand, that he is perfectly righteous, and therefore need not be ſolicitous about purity of heart and holineſs of life.

If

If the righteouſneſs of the Son of God, imputed to the believer, be all that is neceſſary to qualify him for and introduce him to Heaven, it ſeems to follow that every true believer is alike holy, and conſequently muſt be equally happy and glorious. If no man is a believer till by the ſpirit of God working irreſiſtibly upon his mind he is perſuaded that Chriſt died for him in particular, it would ſeem that there can be no ſuch thing as a doubting Chriſtian. Theſe doctrines as they are moſt abſurd in themſelves, run contrary to the whole current of ſcripture. Though the Son of God did and ſuffered all that his father had appointed, and we are accepted in the beloved, yet we muſt tread in his ſteps, imitate his example, obey his laws as our king, and believe on him as a prophet, as well as rely upon him as a prieſt; otherwiſe he will never own us for his diſciples, nor can we have any benefit by what he either did or ſuffered. This by the chriſtian Covenant we muſt do ſincerely, univerſally, and conſtantly; depending on the gracious aſſiſtance of the ſanctifying ſpirit of God, and rejoicing in the gracious proviſion made for our failings and unallowed tranſgreſſions. The grace of God is abundantly manifeſted to us in bringing ſalvation to all men upon ſuch terms, in promiſing pardon to penitents, grace to aſſiſt good men in *working out their ſalvation with fear and trembling*, and eternal life to all *who deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly, in this preſent evil world.* And I will venture to affirm that to have made the terms of a ſinners acceptance eaſier than repentance, or to have admitted them to communion with him in glory and happineſs, without purity of diſpoſition and holineſs of life, could never be reconciled to the rectitude of the moral Governour of the world. Agreeably to this we are aſſured that the *pure in heart ſhall*

ſee

ſee God, the meek and peaceable ſhall inherit the kingdom of Heaven------*That without holineſs no man ſhall ſee the Lord*------*That not every one that ſaith Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of Chriſts father who is in Heaven,* and our Lord tells us, the inquiry at the great day will be, *have we fed the hungry, clothed the naked, viſited the ſick, and impriſoned? if ſo, enter into the joy of your Lord.* But I will put this matter upon a ſhort iſſue; I challenge all the *Antinomians* in the world, and all others who aſſert that the goſpel is a bundle of promiſes, requiring no conditions of duty on the believers part, to ſhew me one promiſe of any one grace in the new Teſtament, that I ſhall not be able to prove is in ſome other part of Scripture ſuſpended upon the performance of ſome duty required on our part; nay I undertake to ſhew that the obtaining and exerciſing that very grace or virtue is required of us as a part of our duty.

I farther deſire them, if they can, to ſhew that pardon, the aſſiſtance of Gods ſpirit and grace, and eternal life are promiſed unconditionally, or ſuſpended upon no other condition but that we believe Chriſt died for us. If they can do this, I will readily acknowledge that of all the books in the world the chriſtian rule is the moſt dark and unintelligible; but till this is made out, I hope proteſtant Diſſenters will be cautious of joining their party. Thus have I fairly done what I thought my duty; if any perſons ſhall endeavour in the ſpirit of meekneſs to ſhow that I am in any thing miſtaken, I ſhall thank them for the favour, and either defend or retract what I have ſaid; but if I am treated with ſcurrility and railing, inſtead of ſober reaſon and argument, I know how to pity and forgive ſuch authors, and to look upon it as a ſufficient proof that they neither need nor indeed deſerve a reply.

F I N I S.